Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Mhuire na nÁird
Shillelagh, County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 19748O

Date of inspection: 4th April 2011
1. Introduction

S.N. Mhuire na nÁird is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. It provides education for pupils from junior infants to sixth class in a multi-grade setting and serves pupils from the local village and the rural hinterland. As a significant number of the 77 pupils miss more than twenty days, strategies to address this are required. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The board of management and parent body are highly supportive of the school.
- The principal demonstrates the qualities of instructional leadership and promotes an inclusive and collegiate school environment.
- The caring teachers are committed to their pupils' learning and pastoral care.
- The pupils are commended on their excellent behaviour and application to learning.
- The well-maintained school building and grounds provide a stimulating and aesthetically-pleasing learning environment.
- Good-quality teaching enables the pupils to attain high levels of attainment in Mathematics.
- Many pupils attain very high levels of oral fluency in Irish.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is excellent.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The post holders’ responsibilities should be reviewed to ensure that they include specific curriculum leadership roles in line with the school’s strategic development plan.
- The use of assessment data to enhance the provision for differentiated teaching and learning should be extended.
- The school should adopt a cyclical approach to the teaching of writing genres and enable the pupils to amend their work in the light of formative feedback.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school and ensures that the building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. As indicated by the parent questionnaires, consideration should be given to informing the parent body about its work, perhaps through the publication of an annual report.
• The principal exhibits well-honed organisational and interpersonal skills that enable her to lead and manage the school effectively. She demonstrates the qualities of instructional leadership and promotes an inclusive and collegiate school environment. She is well supported by a committed in-school management team comprising a deputy principal and special duties teacher with whom she meets regularly. It is now timely to review their responsibilities to ensure that they include specific curriculum leadership roles in line with the school’s strategic development plan. The school secretary/caretaker contributes significantly to the smooth operation of the school.

• The well-maintained school building and grounds provide a stimulating and aesthetically-pleasing learning environment. The school is equipped to a good standard with a broad and appropriate range of resources to enhance teaching and learning.

• The management of pupils is very good. As reflected in the parent questionnaires, the teachers are clearly committed to the pupils’ general welfare and pastoral care. A mutually-respectful and caring atmosphere is evident in the school and the pupils are commended on their excellent behaviour.

• The compact nature of the school environment greatly facilitates informal communication with the school community. Effective procedures, including regular newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and induction meetings for new pupils, are also in place to facilitate more formal communication. The recently re-established parents’ association supports the school through fundraising, hospitality and maintenance of the school garden. Parents also assist with art projects.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of whole-school planning is good. The school plan encompasses relevant curriculum, organisational and administrative policies. These plans are ratified by the board. As indicated in the parent questionnaires, consideration should be given to affording the parents a greater role in future revisions to pertinent policies.

• The quality of teachers’ individual classroom planning is good. Each teacher produces comprehensive long-term and short-term schemes of work on an agreed school format. Progress records are maintained dutifully.

• The school engages effectively in a range of self-evaluation strategies and uses this information to inform the school development plan.

• School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. All teachers provide stimulating, attractive and print-rich learning environments. They present structured, well-resourced
lessons that usually accommodate the multi-class settings and make provision for activity-based learning. The pupil questionnaires indicate that they are provided with frequent opportunities for engagement in group work. In some instances, the balance of didactic teaching and scaffolded, discovery learning should be reviewed. Some highly effective use is made of ICT to enhance and extend the pupils’ learning. The teachers employ a variety of assessment modes, including teacher-designed tests, checklists and work samples to monitor their pupils’ progress. Standardised tests, which are administered annually, assist with the identification of pupils who may benefit from supplementary teaching. Consideration should also be given both to using assessment data to enhance the provision for differentiation and to extending the provision for pupil self-assessment. In most classes, pupils’ work is marked very regularly and it is advised that all teachers adopt this practice.

- Ar an iomlán, sroichte caighdeán an-mhaith i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Úsáideann na múinteoirí go léir an Ghaeilge mar theanga teagaisg agus, chomh maith leis sin, baineann roint de na múinteoirí agus roint de na páistí úsáid as an nGaeilge mar theanga cumarsáide ar bhonn teagmhasach. Is léir go bhfuil dearachd dearfach i leith na teanga Gaeilge ag formhór na ndaltaí agus baineann cuid mhaith acu caighdeán an-mhaith amach sa Ghaeilge labhartha. Leagtar béim mhór ar an gcur chuige cumarsáide i guid mhaith de na ranganna agus moltar go gcuirfí an sárchealachtaí seo i bhfeidhm sna ranganna uilig. Tá eagsúlaíocht le sonrú ar chaighdeán na ndaltaí sa léitheoireacht, maidir le líofacht agus scileanna tuiscinteach. Dírítear roint airde ar scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach agus tugtar aire do mhúineadh na gramadáid mar is cuí. Is é an chéad dúshlán eile sa ghné seo den churaclam ná athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar chur chuige na scoile maidir le leanúnachas agus forbairt sa léitheoireacht agus sa scribhneoireacht.

The overall standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. All teachers use Irish as the medium of instruction and some teachers and pupils also communicate incidentally through Irish. Most pupils exhibit a positive attitude towards the language and many attain very good levels of oral competence. High priority is given to the communicative approach in several classes and it is recommended this excellent practice be implemented consistently across the school. The pupils read with varying levels of fluency and comprehension. Some provision is made for the creative writing process and due regard is paid to the teaching of grammar. The next challenges for the school in relation to this curriculum area are to review the provision for continuity and progression across the strands of reading and writing.

- The standard of teaching and learning in English is good. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of oral language skills and most pupils engage in discussions in an articulate and confident manner. A solid foundation in reading skills is laid in the infant classes where the pupils are taught a basic sight vocabulary and the use of phonic, context and picture cues. Best practice from the junior to senior classes includes the teaching of explicit reading skills and the effective use of class novels to foster a love of literature and promote responding to text. To further build on this good practice, it is advised that provision be made for guided reading sessions with differentiated reading groups. The pupils are enabled to produce writing in a wide variety of genres. To enhance the quality of their work, it is recommended that the school adopt a cyclical approach to the teaching of genres and enable the pupils to amend their work in the light of formative feedback.

- The overall standard of teaching Mathematics is very good and the pupils display very good levels of attainment. The planned programme makes good provision for continuity and progression in the delivery of the various curriculum strands. All teachers present structured lessons that accommodate the multi-class setting. To complement this good practice, consideration should be given to facilitating greater differentiation within classes.
Throughout the school, appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition and application of mathematical language and due regard is given to the learning of mathematical facts. All teachers make provision for practical mathematical activities and, in the best instances, make highly effective use of differentiated questioning to consolidate and challenge the pupils’ comprehension. To further enhance the pupils’ understanding of concepts, it is recommended that the provision for scaffolded, discovery-based learning be extended.

- Teaching and learning in social, personal and health education are of a good standard. The school plan makes good provision for the balanced delivery of all curriculum strands. The teachers utilise a variety of teaching methods, including circle time, role-play, story and games, to explore issues that are relevant to the pupils’ personal development. Pupils engage well in the activities and the quality of interactions, both amongst the pupils and between the pupils and teachers, is of a good standard. Specific emphasis is also placed on both pastoral care, and health-and-safety issues at whole-school assemblies.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is excellent. Considerable expertise exists within the SEN team which comprises a shared learning-support teacher and a part-time resource teacher who provide high-quality support in English and mathematics. These committed, knowledgeable and caring teachers present well-structured, stimulating lessons that are tailored to the pupils’ individual needs. In line with the school policy, they facilitate early intervention. They make effective use of both diagnostic tests and teacher observation to inform comprehensive learning plans and track their pupils’ progress. The current model of intervention comprises both withdrawal and in-class support and it is recommended that the provision for in-class support be extended to all classrooms.

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